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# THE Baptist Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION SINCE 1877

## GREAT COMMISSION ADVANCE

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## Great Commission Advance

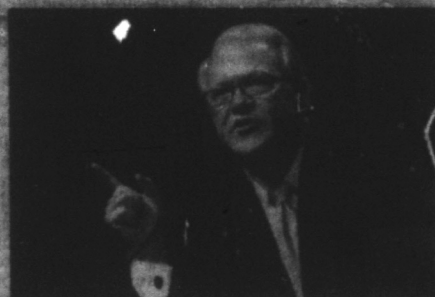
### Southern Baptists urged to 'do more'

BALTIMORE (BP) — Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee President Frank S. Page issued a challenge to Southern Baptists at the SBC annual meeting to "do more" to reach the world with the Gospel.

Page, former interim pastor of First Church, Jackson, set forth his vision for Great Commission Advance, an initiative to increase missions involvement among individuals and churches, during his report to the convention on June 10 in Baltimore.

C. Ashley Clayton, Executive Committee vice president for Cooperative Program and stewardship, told SBC LIFE, journal of the Executive Committee, in an interview prior to the annual meeting, "In its most condensed and basic form, Great Commission Advance calls for Southern Baptists to simply 'do more.'"

Page called on all Southern Baptists — individuals, families, and churches — to sacrificially do more to advance the Great Commission "so that every person has the opportunity to hear the Gospel," Clayton said.



#### PAGE

Page told SBC LIFE in an interview prior to the annual meeting that "doing more" in the area of personal stewardship is essential to missions involvement. He urged Southern Baptists to commit to establishing a biblical standard of giving and generosity.

Page also encouraged Southern Baptists to participate in missions at the local, state, national, and

see ADVANCE on p. 6

## MISSISSIPPIANS IN BALTIMORE

David Hamilton (left), immediate past president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention and pastor of West Heights Church in Pontotoc, and his wife Susan settle in for the opening call to order June 10 at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention at the Baltimore Convention Center in Baltimore, Md. For complete coverage of the annual meeting, see next week's issue of The Baptist Record. (Photo by Tony Martin)

## Lifeway takes 2015 VBS 'Off the Map'

NASHVILLE (BP) — With the 2014 Vacation Bible School (VBS) season well underway, kids will have the opportunity next summer to explore and discover the adventure of life during a Journey Off the Map, the 2015 VBS curriculum from LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville.

The description of the 2015 VBS theme invites students to "set out on a journey to uncharted territory where they will encounter the unexpected waiting around every bend. On this expedition of a lifetime, kids will need to stick close to their guide in order to survive. They will discover that Jesus is the ultimate guide on a journey uncharted by them, but known by Him."

LifeWay VBS specialist Jerry Wooley said Journey Off the Map will be "filled with things kids like such as adventure, discovery, cool tree houses, challenging destinations, bright colors, and fun music."

Wooley said the theme's message is particularly relevant today. "Kids are being bombarded by loud voices telling them what they should do, where they should go, who they should be and what they should believe. The messages are confusing and misleading."

"[K]ids of all ages, meaning adults too, need to know that in the midst of these voices there is one and only one they can totally depend on."

Most previous VBS materials were geared to build to an evangelistic lesson later in the week. This year, LifeWay felt it would be better to introduce the idea of a personal relationship with Christ on the first day.

"Since Journey Off the Map is based on following Jesus as our guide, it is necessary to introduce this relationship on day one and build from there," Wooley said.

The theme verse for the week will be Isaiah 30:21: "And whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear this command behind you: 'This is the way. Walk in it.'"

Participants will learn to trust Jesus as Savior and walk along the journey of life becoming more like Him as they traverse the adventures in The Overlook Worship Rally, Tangled Branch Tree House Bible Study, Shady Grove Crafts, Boulder Bridge Missions, Rushing Waters Music, Rappelling Ravine Recreation, and Sur-



vival Springs Snacks. Each day, kids will discover more truths about Jesus as their guide.

The 2015 VBS Jump Start Kit will be available for purchase in early October to help church leaders and VBS directors in the planning and promotion of the event. All other resources will be released in December.

For leaders wanting to experience Journey Off the Map a little early and learn from experts on how churches can best use the materials, LifeWay will host preview events in four locations next year: Ridgecrest (N.C.) Conference Center, Jan. 9-10; Fort Worth, Jan. 16-17; Nashville (three events) Jan. 22-24; and two events in Kissimmee, Fla., Feb. 6-7.

Additional information about the materials and preview events can be found at LifeWay.com/VBS.

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## From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

### Zip the lips

While you slept last week, a team of Mississippi Baptists had a close scrape with authorities in a country that could be generously described as hostile to the Gospel. For the safety of future efforts in the area, that's about all that can be written about their encounter.

It's not the first time Mississippi Baptists have found themselves in a dangerous situation on the other side of the world. As a matter of fact, it happens with some regularity but due to the sensitive nature of most of the incidents, we don't get to read about it in The Baptist Record.

Some cases unfold like the script of the next Indiana Jones movie. Other cases simply involve an overly aggressive bureaucrat. All cases are serious, though, when they involve our brothers and sisters in Christ who are striving at great personal risk to answer the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

It's a confident estimation that at any given time, Mississippi Baptists are somewhere in the world giving witness to the saving grace of our Lord and Savior. They won't be featured in the headlines or spotlighted on the nightly television news, but they are there. In areas where they have to keep their heads down, they are hard at work on behalf of the Cause whether or not we are aware of them.

Teams of trained Mississippi Baptist workers are gearing up right now for the next trip, wherever it may take them. They will be working closely with Southern Baptist personnel on the scene to get into areas where no Christian has trod in generations — or maybe forever. There are at least three ever-present dangers all of them face that should keep us on our knees in prayer for them every day, around the clock:

- Many of the areas are overwhelmingly Muslim, and more than a few of the areas have been locked in civil war for many years with Islamic extremists. All workers, and especially those from religious organizations, could be targeted by terrorists. In some areas, Christian persecution is official state policy.

- Career Southern Baptist personnel in these areas risk expo-

sure, expulsion, or worse if their profiles get too elevated during their time with teams from the U.S. We all need to be discreet with the information we have, whether we are on the trip or back in the States supporting the workers.

Workers could be denied admittance to any of the many countries that view Christians and Christianity as a threat to the social order. Many borders are closed to outsiders, and scrutiny of incoming workers continues to increase with each passing year.

We need to understand that Christians are not welcome in many of these countries. As a television commentator put it, "Some of these governments would rather see their children starve before they accept a crumb of bread from the wrong groups." Those wrong groups include Christians.

The saying, "Loose lips sink ships," was used extensively in World War II, and it means that information from people who casually discussed which troops were shipping out and where they were going could result in the enemy acquiring the information and thus being able to sink a shipload of soldiers before they reached a faraway battlefield.

Loose lips can also sink our Mississippi Baptist and Southern Baptist efforts to keep workers safe in foreign countries. At a time when Christians are at risk all over the world, we must be very careful about what we say and write. For example, neither The Baptist Record nor the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board website identify the countries or specific areas into which volunteers will be traveling when doing so could jeopardize their safety or the success of their trip.

Those of us who are responsible for church and association newsletters, bulletins, and websites — especially websites and the many other available modern communication tools we have at our disposal — should be circumspect, too.

The Baptist Record will keep Mississippi Baptists informed, but with an awareness of what's at stake to help guard the safety and security of the many determined and dedicated workers and volunteers around the world. That's a good policy for all of us to heed.

## CP on the way up

Are you ready for some good news? The most recent Annual Church Profile (ACP) data reveal a new and positive direction in Southern Baptist missions and ministries funding through the Cooperative Program.

Over the past three decades, the average Cooperative Program gift per church, as a percentage of a church's undesignated receipts, had steadily declined. For example, in 1982, across all Southern Baptist churches, the average Cooperative Program gift per church was 10.7% of a church's undesignated receipts. Each year since, with the exception of three slight upticks in 1995, 1997, and 1999, there was a predictable and steady decline of average Cooperative Program gifts per church.

Since 1999, average percent of undesignated gifts from cooperating churches has declined by about two-tenths of a percent per year, reaching its lowest point in 2011: 5.4% across all SBC churches.

We see signs of hope. In 2012, the average Cooperative Program gift per church ticked up slightly to 5.4%. Now, for some really good news — the 2013 Cooperative Program reports and SBC Annual Church Profile data show the average Cooperative Program gifts per church has again risen slightly to 5.5%.

This is the first two-year growth in average percentage gifts through CP in more than 30 years. Instead of declining, as some had predicted, Cooperative Program gifts have moved in the other direction.

If the Cooperative Program were a publicly-traded "big box" company, and if analysts had projected a continued steady decline in business and market share, and then good news became public like our current Cooperative Program report, you can believe renewed confidence in the stock would be driving up prices on the Dow Jones Industrial Average.

We routinely hear from some quarters that we (Southern Baptists) are on a steady march to the edge of a cliff. Yes, many of our reported numbers give us cause for grave concern, but is it time to reframe the image? Could we, perhaps, be standing at a new starting line?

Keep in mind that when we compute average percentage Cooperative Program gifts per church, we compute all Southern Baptist churches: graying churches,



### Guest opinion

with C. Ashley Clayton

growing churches, new churches, contemporary churches, ethnic churches, mega-churches, small churches, legacy churches, and churches that gave nothing through the Cooperative Program. Declaring this report about the Cooperative Program to be a clear-cut winner may be a matter of opinion, and I know there is cause for reticence and caution, but regardless of the celebratory rhetoric you may detect in this article, this is good news and certainly worthy of our attention and our celebration!

Again, when people expect one thing to happen and the exact opposite happens, you absolutely must take notice. You absolutely must find the best way forward.

Consider this. It appears that Southern Baptist churches are making positive, cooperative choices! Not only did the average percentage of Cooperative Program gifts per church go up, total Cooperative Program dollars went up too and did so during a time that many of churches' undesignated receipts and total church receipts declined.

Usually, Cooperative Program giving and church plate offerings tend to move together but not this time. The 2013 ACP data confirm our churches are giving more to missions through the Cooperative Program, while church members are giving less through their churches.

On this cusp of something new, there has never been a better time for Southern Baptists to settle the Lordship issue about money and honor the Lord through tithes and offerings.

Clayton is vice president for Cooperative Program and stewardship with the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee in Nashville.

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# U.S. Senate censures Sudan for Christian's recent death sentence

WASHINGTON (BP) — The U.S. Senate has unanimously condemned the death sentence of a Sudanese Christian woman and called for the immediate release from prison of her children and her.

**IBRAHIM**

Senators voted by unanimous consent June 3 for a resolution in support of Meriam Yahia Ibrahim, who was convicted in Sudan under Sharia (Islamic) law for apostasy, defined as leaving Islam, by refusing to renounce her Christian faith. A Khartoum court sentenced her to death by hanging. She also received a sentence of 100 lashes for adultery on the basis of her marriage to a Christian, Daniel Wani, a South Sudanese-born citizen of the United States.

Ibrahim gave birth to her second child last week in the Sudan women's prison where she is shackled to the floor. Her newborn daughter and 20-month-old son are in prison alongside her, because Sudanese authorities will not grant custody to their Christian father.

Rep. Trent Franks, R-Ariz., has introduced a similar resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives but a floor vote has yet to take place.

Russell D. Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, applauded the Senate action and called Ibrahim "a living picture of Jesus keeping his promise, made to us at Caesarea Philippi."

"Jesus said that He would build His church, and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it," Moore said in a statement for Baptist Press. "As we thank God for the Gospel to which she clings, let's continue to pray that these actions by our officials will be the catalyst for [her] release."

Moore also commended a June 2 letter from Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., urgently requesting U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to "use all official

and personal channels" to seek Ibrahim's release. In his letter to Kerry, Inhofe asked the State Department to explore providing political asylum to Ibrahim and her family.

"I ask you to use your powers of diplomacy to convince the Sudanese government to end this all too real and potentially deadly case of religious persecution," Inhofe wrote.

Moore, as well, wrote Kerry seeking robust action. In his May 20 letter, Moore encouraged Kerry to denounce Ibrahim's sentencing and to demand her release.

So far, the response from Kerry and the State Department to Ibrahim's plight has failed to match the requests from religious freedom advocates inside and outside Congress.

The Senate's resolution not only condemned the sentencing and called for Ibrahim's release but urged the U.S. government to refuse to normalize relations with or lift sanctions against Sudan until the Eastern African country abides by "international standards of freedom of religion or belief."

The measure also called for Sudan to work to ensure its new constitution incorporates religious liberty protections.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., the resolution's chief sponsor, said after its passage, "While the Senate made strides in its commitment to religious freedom, Ms. Ibrahim is still in the fight of her life. The world is watching as we await the decision of the Sudanese court, and today's passage is a testament to our obligation to Ms. Ibrahim and her young family."

Inhofe was a leading cosponsor of the bill, as were Democratic Sens. Christopher Coons of Delaware and Robert Menendez of New Jersey.

If the Sudanese court refuses to relent, Ibrahim's death sentence reportedly would be carried out after she nurses her daughter to age two.

The court confirmed the sentence May 15 after Ibrahim was granted 15 days to recant her faith. Ibrahim told the court, "I am a Christian, and I have never been a Muslim."

"Jesus said that He would build His church, and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. As we thank God for the Gospel to which she clings, let's continue to pray that these actions by our officials will be the catalyst for [her] release."

**Russell D. Moore**

president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission



## Islamic terrorists escalate war against Nigerian Christians

**NORTHEAST NIGERIA (BP)**

— Boko Haram terrorists posing as soldiers and preachers have killed hundreds of civilians since kidnapping more than 200 Christian school girls in April, amid unsubstantiated reports that 15 Nigerian military officers have been court-martialed for aiding the terrorists.

In the latest attack on June 4, Boko Haram terrorists posing as preachers killed an estimated 45 people in Barderi village near Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, BBC News reported. Boko Haram members told civilians they had come to preach, then opened fire on a crowd that gathered to hear, according to BBC.

On June 2, Boko Haram militants dressed as soldiers and driving military-style vehicles attacked three villages in northeastern Nigeria, gunning down at least 200 civilians who gathered, the Associated Press reported. The militants claimed to be soldiers protecting civilians from impending attacks there, in Danjara, Agapalwa, and Antagara villages.

Boko Haram has raided additional villages in northeastern Nigeria, which has been under near constant attack since mid-May. Morning Star News reported. Assaults on Attagara, Gwoshe, Hawul, and other Gwoza villages have destroyed 36 churches, sources told Morning Star News.

"The Boko Haram Islamists

have destroyed 36 churches in Gwoza area, including that of Attagara attacked on Sunday (June 1)," Morning Star News quoted Rebecca Dali, whose husband is president of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria. "We now have only two churches that have not been affected."

Before the June attacks, Boko Haram had killed at least 470 civilians and Christians since kidnapping about 275 teenage students from a Chibok boarding school, Reuters News reported in late May.

Even though northeastern Nigeria has been under a state of emergency declared by Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan a year ago, Boko Haram has strengthened its assault and many have accused the Jonathan administration of inefficiency in protecting civilians.

The Nigerian newspaper Leadership reported June 3 that at least 15 senior Nigerian military officers have been court-martialed for providing information and ammunitions to Boko Haram militants. The Associated Press, Christian Today, and other news outlets have carried the reports but top Nigerian officials have called the reports inaccurate.

Leadership quoted an unnamed "top security" official as its source.

"The suspects include about 10 generals and other ranks, not to talk of soldiers who have been found culpable of

sabotaging our operations," Leadership quoted the official. "They are facing trial before court-martials set up by their divisions; some have been found guilty, and some are still facing trial."

News reports have circulated since 2012 that Nigerian military officials were aiding Boko Haram's efforts to enforce Sharia law in Nigeria, where an estimated 51.3% of the population is Christian.

In May, 2013, Lt.-Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika, Nigerian chief of army staff at the time, said at the opening of the Army Transportation and Innovation Centre in Abuja, that Nigerian Army soldiers had been arrested for conspiring with Boko Haram.

"There are some soldiers that have been found to be posting negative comments on the Internet and some conversing with insurgents," Nigeria Today newspaper quoted Ihejirika. "I want to state that any officer or soldier caught linked one way or the other will be disciplined severely, there are no two ways about it."

In January, Jonathan replaced his entire military leadership, reportedly in an effort to strengthen its struggle against Boko Haram.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian military has said it has learned the location of some 223 schoolgirls kidnapped seven weeks ago, but has said rescuing the victims by force might endanger the girls.



Although I grew up in a family of rough and rowdy boys, it was also a family that required us to learn appropriate words associated with Southern niceties. Sometimes they were referred to as "the magic words" and there was a cluster of them that we were not only required to learn but to use and beyond that we were required to use them sincerely. They were words like *yes sir* and *no sir*, *yes ma'am*, and *no ma'am*, *please*, *thank you*, and an occasional, *I'm sorry*. I thought that was the way all families acted and the way they taught their children. I was late into my elementary school years when I heard the first child saying *yeah* and *naw* to a teacher or their parents. It made a profound impact on me the day that one of my new friends who had moved into our Mississippi world from another state told me that my parents had taught me wrong when at the table we would ask, "Pass the potatoes, please." He said that his father told him never to do that; that he was not going to raise his kids sitting at the table, begging somebody for their food. I was shocked, for then and even now, I did not get it.

I never felt like I was begging whether I was at my family's table or at summer camp. *Please* for me seemed to replace the sharp edge of a command with the gentle edge of a request. I have since learned that it's probably more of a Southern thing than it is a national or worldwide



## Getting the Right Words in the Right Place

experience, but, be that as it may, I still believe it is right and no one loses by being kind. Now with all that said, I am certainly aware of the fact that our world has taken on the words of harshness rather than gentleness or kindness, as opposed to being nice and caring with each other and using language of respect and appreciation. Screaming and yelling at one another and using demeaning, disparaging, degrading vile and vulgar terms have become the accepted language of the day.

The totality of our Christian life, whether it is in our sight or our

speech, our actions or our reactions, all should be measured by the standard of Jesus. The Scripture says, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). So whatever it is we are saying and the manner with which we say it, is not a reflection of the moment or just a reflection of what we think about someone else. It is a reflection of what resides in our hearts and when we keep our hearts right the rest of us will get in line. It is interesting to watch that even when we get our words in the wrong place, when our heart is in the right place it's

understood. I'm thankful that my grandchildren are learning some of the proper speech in a polite society although they may not always get the words in the right place.

Recently, we were in a crowd of people most of whom we didn't know. My almost four-year-old grandson had a Frisbee that he was anxious to play with. This wide-eyed little kid with reckless abandon reared back and threw the Frisbee somewhat in my direction but it went off course and hit a gentleman standing a couple of feet away from me. As it fell harmlessly to the ground I looked at my grandson and said, "What do you say?" He looked the man straight in the eye and said, "Thank you!" and got his Frisbee and ran off. I looked at the guy and apologized. He chuckled and said, "That's fine," and walked away. At least it was an effort. Just a quick reminder that the magic words are not designed for preschoolers though they need to learn them. These words are given to us in a lifelong assignment and if by chance they have fallen out of your daily use, pick them up, dust them off and commit today to use them frequently with everyone you run into.

You may find that the words bless you and I can assure you they will bless others. Thank you.

The author can be contacted at [directions@mbcb.org](mailto:directions@mbcb.org).

## Vacation Bible School

► Neshoba Church, Union: June 16 - 20, 5 - 8 p.m.

► Beulah Church, Lexington: June 16 - 20, 8:30 - 11:30 a.m.; ages 3 - 6th grade; family night, June 20, 6 p.m.; for information, call (662) 528-1053.

► Ethel Church, Ethel: June 16 - 20, 6 - 8 p.m.; grades 1 - 6.

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Clue: C = L

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Isaiah Forty: Eight

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## Need a light?

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you.  
(I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins  
and freedom from eternal  
death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose  
from the grave to forgive my sins  
and to restore my relationship  
with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ  
into my life. From this time on,  
I want to live in a loving relationship  
with Him. (I receive Christ as  
my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.



## Just for the Record



**CALVARY CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO**, recognized college graduates Hannah Phillips, Kaylie Crosby, and Amy Burt recently. Hal Hatten, pastor.



**THOMPSON HILL CHURCH AND ARLINGTON CHURCH, BEAUMONT**, held their Sunday night services at the home of Jack Lovelace May 18. Lovelace has been ill for months and missed being at church. The two church families came together to worship at his home.



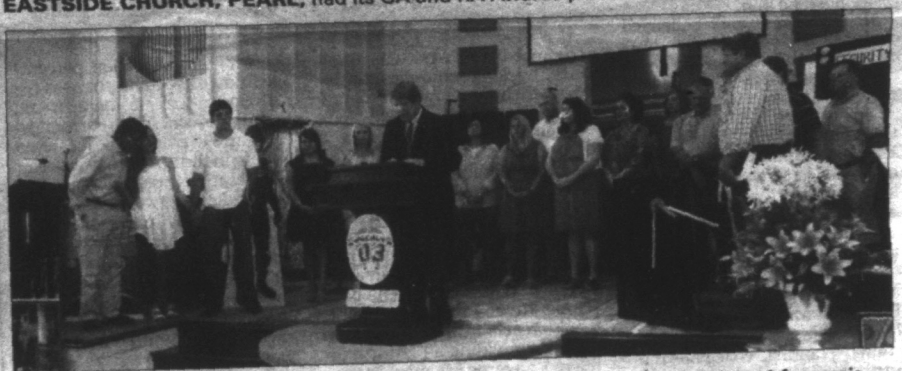
**CONCORD CHURCH, BENTON-TIPPAH ASSOCIATION**, honored mothers at their homecoming and Mother's Day program. Shown, from left, are Allie Walker, youngest mother; Sonya Pannell, youngest grandmother; Anne Glidewell, grandmother with most grandchildren; and Virginia Carpenter Alexander, oldest mother.



**EASTSIDE CHURCH, PEARL**, had its GA and RA Awards presentation June 1.



**CARROLL-MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION** sponsored a mission trip to Garaywa Camp and Conference Center May 5-9 to get the facility ready for summer activities. Shown are the participants.



**WEST HEIGHTS CHURCH, PONTOTOC**, held a commissioning service June 1 for a mission team that will be working in New York City this month. David Hamilton, pastor.



**BIG LEVEL CHURCH, WIGGINS**, will be sending 23 individuals on a one-week mission trip to Guatemala. Volunteers will be assisting in medical, dental, commissary, vocational, and spiritual ministries.



**THE BROTHERHOOD OF RAWLS SPRINGS CHURCH, HATTIESBURG**, held a dedication of the Recognition Garden in honor/memory of veterans May 25. The program consisted of guest speaker Col. Ben Simmons, Mississippi National Guard. The 3656 CRD served as honor guard, and music was provided by the 41st Army Band. Michael Morgan, pastor.

### In other Church News:

► **Oak Grove Church, Shubuta**, will present Young Christians in the World, a drama and musical presentation/youth rally, June 14, 7 p.m. Refreshments.

► The Insight Student Choir from Lakeside Church, Canton, Tex., will be in concert at **North Long Beach Church, Long Beach**, June 15, 11 a.m.



# Investigation underway over courthouse entry

By William H. Perkins Jr.  
Editor

Hinds County District Attorney Robert Shuler Smith announced June 6 that he will open an investigation into why three people became locked inside the Hinds County Courthouse in Jackson in the early morning hours after the June 3 election.

The three individuals, Central Mississippi Tea Party President Janis Lane; Scott Brewster, a paid staffer for Chris McDaniel's campaign for the U.S. Senate against incumbent Thad Cochran; and Rob Chambers, a consultant for the Christian Action Commission were cleared June 4 of any wrongdoing in an investigation by the Hinds County Sheriff's Office. However, Smith agreed

to conduct his own investigation after prodding from Hinds County Supervisor Robert Graham. There was no indication when the investigation would be completed.

The three have reportedly said that they entered the courthouse through an unsecured side door at about 1:30 a.m. to observe vote counting, and found themselves locked inside after realizing the building was closed and no vote count was occurring.

Jim Futral, executive director of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board in Jackson, issued the following statement on Friday morning, June 6: "I am very appreciative of the swift manner in which Dr. Jimmy Porter, executive director of the Christian Action Commission, and the Commission's trustee leadership

have addressed the incident at the Hinds County Courthouse on the morning of June 4. Details are still emerging, and I want Mississippi Baptists to know that this situation is being dealt with as properly and as fairly as possible at the present time."

Jimmy Porter, executive director of the Christian Action Commission in Jackson, issued the following statement on Monday morning, June 9: "I cannot comment on this incident while it is under active investigation by the Hinds County District Attorney. I can say the facts surrounding this incident are still being reviewed by the trustees of the Christian Action Commission. In order to be fair to everyone involved, that is the only statement that will be made at this time."

## ADVANCE

cont. from p. 1

international levels. For some, "doing more" may mean surrendering to God's call to vocational ministry as a pastor, chaplain, church planter or international missionary, he said.

In addition, Page challenged churches to increase their level of support through the Cooperative Program for Southern Baptist missions and ministries.

Since being elected Executive Committee president in 2010, Page has emphasized that the Cooperative Program is about missions and ministries, not numbers and percentages, Clayton said.

Southern Baptist missions and ministries at the state, national, and international levels are fueled by the Cooperative Program. Ministries like disaster relief, international missions, church planting, collegiate ministry, theological education, care for neglected children, and moral advocacy are supported by dollars contributed through the Cooperative Program, he said.

One of the primary objectives of Great Commission Advance is to address the decline in Cooperative Program giving over the past two decades, Clayton said. In 1982, churches were giving an average of 10.7% of their undesignated receipts to cooperative missions and ministries through the Cooperative Program. That number has dropped to 5.4%, declining by an average of about 0.2% each year.

In 2012, the average percent of churches' Cooperative Program giving held steady for the first time since the 1990s and slightly ticked upward.

The previous year, Page had

"The long-held guiding principle of the SBC is as true today as when it was founded. We can do more together than we can do alone."

C. Ashley Clayton

Executive Committee vice president for Cooperative Program and stewardship

announced the "1% CP Challenge," asking churches to increase their Cooperative Program giving by one percentage point of their undesignated receipts. If every church increased their Cooperative Program giving by one percent, it would bring in an extra \$100 million for SBC missions and ministries, Page said.

If church Cooperative Program giving returned to an average of 10% as it was in the past, Cooperative Program receipts would reach nearly one billion dollars, providing a platform for the most aggressive missions enterprise in the history of Christendom, he said.

The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, headquartered in Richmond, Va., has estimated that it needs 7,000 missionaries on the field to initially reach every known unengaged, unreached people group in the world, but it currently has less than 5,000.

The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, headquartered in the Greater Atlanta area, has committed to planting 15,000 churches in 10 years. Increased Cooperative Program dollars also would keep the costs of seminary training at a minimum, making theological education more accessible to all Southern Baptists.

Page has led the Executive Committee to reduce its Coopera-

tive Program allocation percentage from 3.4% in the 2010-11 fiscal year, to 3.2% in the 2011-12, to three percent in the current fiscal year. He plans to reduce even further in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

Allocation percentages are adjusted every two years. "We're lowering our Cooperative Program allocation, so when you hear me beating the drum and asking for more, it's to go to these other entities to do that which God has called them to do," Page told the Executive Committee at its Feb. 17 meeting.

The SBC was founded on such shared values as missions, evangelism, stewardship, and cooperation, Clayton said. On the basis of those values, Baptists were able to organize and develop a structure through which to accomplish their work, he added.

Great Commission Advance is about refocusing on those values, Clayton said. "We want to elevate our values above mere background noise. When people align with and embrace the values, it will result in increased support for Cooperative Program."

Clayton said the trouble comes when an organization loses sight of its core values. "Knowing the 'why' of an organization is vital to its success," he said. "The long-held guiding principle of the SBC is as true today as when it was founded. We can do more together than we can do alone."

## CLASSIFIEDS

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## MS POSITIONS

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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF BROOKLYN, MS IS PRAYERFULLY SEEKING A YEAR ROUND BI-VOCATIONAL YOUTH PASTOR. Please email cover letter, resume and reference list to allen@alflowerlaw.net.

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# Crisis of Faith: When You Want to Blame Others • Ezekiel 18:1-4,21-23, 25-27,30-32

I've heard it and so have you. A son or a daughter in a family will behave just like their parents and get involved with drugs, alcohol or some other serious sin. Some Christian will say, "It's a generational curse." That sounds spiritual and so usually people agree. I've heard sermons about it and even read books about generational curses.

According to Ezekiel 18, however, no generational curse exists, though there are generational sins and patterns. Ezekiel 18, an often overlooked chapter, teaches that each person answers to the Lord for his own sins. Children often observe in their parents patterns and habits that they take into their own lives. Others inherit a genetic predisposition from their mother or father. If your parents were genetically predisposed to addiction or sexual promiscuity, you must behave responsibly with that predisposition in your own life. Being genetically predisposed to something, however, is not a curse from God.

Note that in Genesis 3:14 and 17 God cursed the serpent and the ground, but never Adam or Eve. God changed their circumstances but never cursed them. Only a few verses in the Bible say that God curses men, and that outcome is reserved for those who completely reject and disobey Him.

Galatians 3:13 reads, "Christ re-

deemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree,' (ESV). God does curse those who are on their way into eternal damnation, but Jesus instead became a curse so that those who trust in Him may not be cursed. God does not curse those He wishes to redeem, instead He became the curse so that they may be rescued.

Many quote Exodus 20:5b in their defense of a generational curse, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me," (ESV). Those who use this verse ignore the next verse. Exodus 20:6 adds, "But showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments," (ESV). In these verses God contrasted the consequences of disobedience with the outcome of obedience. While sin may afflict you and

your offspring for a few generations, serving God yields long-term blessings. Even for those third and fourth generations upon whom the Lord visits the outcome of their ancestors' sins, it's not a curse but consequences.

Jeremiah 31:29-30 echoes Ezekiel 18, "In those days they shall no longer say: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge," (ESV). In the Old Testament, God mainly

dealt with nations and people groups. In the New Testament however, God deals with individuals. Ezekiel 18 teaches that each individual will stand alone before the Lord.

Ezekiel challenged the belief of the day that a son would pay for his father's sins and that even a righteous father would pay for his sons' unrighteousness. The proverb "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and their children's

teeth are set on edge," is not Scripture but obviously was popular in those days. God's earlier pronouncements about visiting the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generations were written to the nation of Israel about the consequences of their collective sins and rebellion. God is clearly stating in Ezekiel 18 that He deals with individuals individually. What does that mean to us today?

It means that God does not have a family plan for salvation, no matter how godly Mama or grandma was. As the old saying goes, God has many children but no grandchildren. You will not go to heaven by being born into a godly family, but by being born again into God's family, even if your father was a preacher or your mother a Sunday school teacher. You will only go to heaven because you have personally trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and in Him alone to save you. Have you experienced God's transforming new birth?

John 1:12 reads, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," (ESV). Today receive the Lord Jesus Christ into your heart and experience God's amazing new birth.

Henson is pastor of Oakdale Church, Brandon.



Explore the Bible  
with Rick Henson

## God is Just • Ezekiel 18:21-24, 30-32

Lady Justice, the Roman goddess of Justice, "is an allegorical personification of the moral force in judicial systems" (Wikipedia). She stands with a double-edge sword in her left hand representing Reason and Justice. A set of scales is suspended from her right hand indicating she is balancing the strengths of support and opposition in a case. Then, during the 15th century, the blindfold was added representing objectivity, being blind or impartial. Does the American judicial system always represent justice for all or does Lady Justice lift her blindfold?

Flowing from the attribute of God's holiness is His justice—always. God is impartial! God's justice holds everyone equally accountable for their actions (Ezekiel 18:4, Rom. 3:23). There is a penalty for sin (Rom. 6:23). Yet, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). God's mercy provides His grace to those who choose to repent and believe in Jesus. Clearly we are responsible individually before God for our behavior, responses, and choices (vss. 19-20).

The prophet Ezekiel ministered during some of the darkest days of Israel's history while Babylon was engaged in bringing about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple which led to the final deportation of the Jews to Baby-

lon. The judgment of God was upon the people because of their own sins, not those of their forefathers. As you study this lesson begin with reading the entire 18th chapter of Ezekiel because all 32 verses address the issue of God's justice. Then ask yourself the following question: How does God want me to respond to this message? The chapter's subtitle is *The Soul Who Sins Shall Die*—sobering truth. Then take time to highlight the following phrases: *he shall die*, *he shall not die*, *he shall surely live*, *what is just and right*, and *then the word turn*. Next, read Romans 1:18-32.

In the first segment of the focal passage, we see God's justice in how He responds to the unrighteous who repent. The key word in verses 21-23 is *turn*. The meaning is simple, stop going in the direction you are heading, turn, and go in an opposite direction. Turn from your sins and do what is just and right. In the final paragraph of the sermon, *Payday Someday*, Robert G. Lee states:

### Bible Studies for Life

with Laura Leathers



"And the only way I know for any man or woman on earth to escape the sinner's payday on earth and the sinner's hell beyond—making sure of the Christian's payday on earth and the Christian's heaven beyond the Christian's payday—is through Christ Jesus, who took the sinner's place upon the Cross, becoming for all sinners all that God must judge, that sinners through faith in Christ Jesus might become all that God cannot judge. Pay Day Some Day."

Turn to Christ today, while it is still today (Heb. 3:13, Isa. 55:7, Rom. 2:4, Ezek. 33:11). Then, in verse

24, we see God is just in how He responds to the seemingly righteous who rebel. "The unsaved are judged because of sin and unbelief. The saved are judged based on their belief in Jesus Christ and the stewardship of the life God has given them" (Lifeway). Every day we sin and there are consequences to our choices. However, sin does not and should not characterize our lives.

Every believer falls short of God's absolute standard of righteousness (Rom. 7). We are to walk in the Spirit and bear much fruit. Finally, God chooses to work through us and we are to respond to God's justice with repentance and a heart of loving devotion. In the final verses of Ezekiel 18, God graciously offers an invitation for repentance. We read in Micah 6:8, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

"For I have no pleasure in death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live" (vs 32). In the New Testament we read, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). And that is the reason why we must go ... and we must tell ... and we sing ... "God of Justice, Saviour to all, Came to rescue the weak and the poor, Chose to serve and not be served, Jesus, You have called us, freely we've received, freely we will give. ... "God of Justice (We Must Go)" written by Tim Hughes.

Leathers is a member of First Church, Madison.

### Clarification

In the page one article entitled, "Gunn appointed to lead Southern Seminary trustees," a paragraph listing Southern Seminary presidents with Mississippi connections did not contain the name of Roy Honeycutt, a Grenada native who served from 1982-93. The Baptist Record regrets the error.

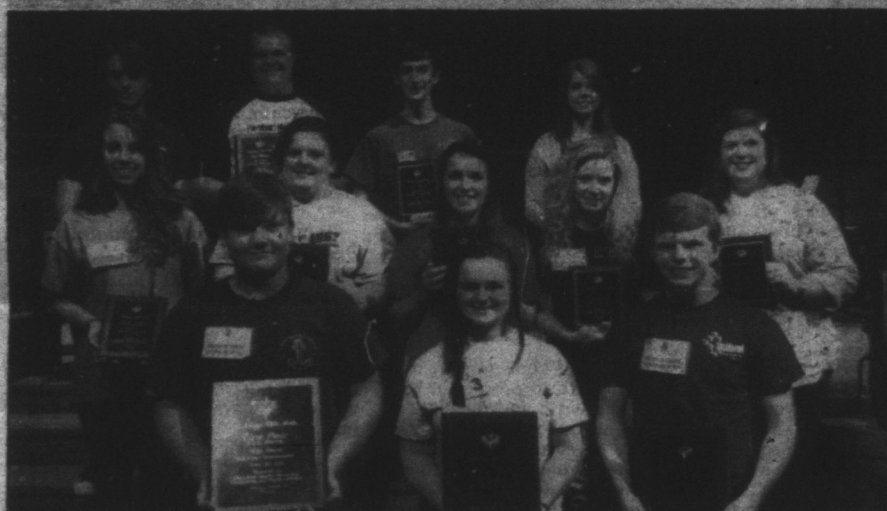


## State Bible Drill Winners



### MIDDLE SCHOOL SELECTION TOURNAMENT PARTICIPANTS AND WINNERS

Front row, from left: Cade Holland, Pinelake Church, Rankin, third place; Madison McCaleb, Cleary Church, Rankin, second place; and Alex Janes, North Ripley Church, Benton-Tippah, first place.



### HIGH SCHOOL SELECTION TOURNAMENT PARTICIPANTS AND WINNERS

Front row, from left: Hunter Sims, Cleary Church, Rankin, first place; Courtney Evans, Raymond Road Church, Metro, second place; and Patrick Lee Scoggin, Highland Church, Jones, third place.



### NINE YEAR SCHOLARSHIP TOURNAMENT PARTICIPANTS AND WINNERS

Front row, from left: Theresa Carter, Cherry Creek Church, Pontotoc, first place; Courtney Evans, Raymond Road Church, Metro, second place; and Lydia Thornton, Community of Grace Church, Monroe, third place.

## Revivals & Homecomings

► Eden Church, Yazoo County: Revival, June 15 - 18; Sun., 10 a.m., followed by lunch; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; Jeff Parker, speaker; Gary Henderson, pastor.

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Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

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